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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7374
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1043
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4590
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8132
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5693
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1495
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1447
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000254

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: DIVERGENT VIEWS ABOUT BURMA'S REFERENDUM

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) While many members of Burma's pro-democracy opposition have decided to "vote no" in the upcoming constitutional referendum, other members often referred to as the "Third Force", are urging the public to vote "yes" as an attempt to compromise with the military. The NLD has begun an educational campaign using its offices throughout Burma to persuade people to vote "no." The NLD also plans to organize students and monks to volunteer to count votes at Rangoon precincts. Meanwhile, the regime appears to be preparing for further use of its brutal tactics during the referendum. The regime arrested three NLD Rakhine State members on April 5, and has also begun a campaign of recruiting and training additional People's Militia (Swan-a-Shin). Regime media tried again to discredit known political activist organizations as "terrorists."

¶2. (S) With U.S. funding from the Burma Special Response fund, 88 Generation is busy with its vote "no" campaign, printing t-shirts, fliers, key chains, stickers, and VCDs to spread their message. Embassy Rangoon also printed copies of the draft constitution and the NLD's vote "no" flier for the party to use in its educational campaign throughout Burma. The NLD has also told us that it plans to recruit students and monks to volunteer to count votes at precincts throughout Rangoon to ensure an honest accounting of votes. They do not know if they will be permitted to carry out this plan.

¶3. (C) Not all of the pro-democracy activists agree with the vote "no" campaign. Prominent social activists and journalists who advocate compromise with the military regime, often referred to as the Third Force, have publicly argued that a "yes" vote in the upcoming referendum would be the only practical way to move Burma forward toward democracy. Nay Win Maung, publisher of The Voice Journal and co-founder of the popular Living Color Magazine, devoted the entire April issue of the magazine to articles advocating a "yes" vote. Another high-profile activist associated with the Third Force is Ma Thanegi, a prominent writer and former close assistant to Aung San Suu Kyi. The Third Force

advocates that political activists and the military must work together to shape a modern, developed nation.

¶4. (C) Nay Win Maung is a close contact of the British Embassy and European diplomats, and works as a consultant for the European assistance agency ECHO. He is the General Secretary of the local NGO Myanmar Egress, founded in 2006 to

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conduct "nation building through positive change in a progressive yet constructive collaboration and working relationship with the government and all interest groups, both local and foreign." Many pro-democracy activists criticized Nay Win Maung after he wrote a recent op-ed proposing that ASSK should make a goodwill gesture to the regime by agreeing to endorse the constitution and then announce that the NLD will contest only half the seats in the 2010 election. He also recommended that ASSK drop "confrontational" politics.

¶5. (SBU) Meanwhile, we continue to see further evidence that the regime will resort to its usual brutal tactics as the constitutional referendum approaches. Pol/econ chief observed several trucks of Swan-a-Shin and fire brigade members training at two major intersections this weekend. Authorities also arrested three NLD members in Taunggot, Rakhine State for allegedly distributing the NLD's referendum statement during a religious ceremony at a local monastery. The NLD told us that the members denied distributing the statements. Police have not released any information about their whereabouts or condition. In addition, the regime has hauled out its usual charges that known political activists are "terrorists" planning subversive acts.

¶6. (C) Comment: There are many different views among the pro-democracy opposition on how to move Burma toward change and a democratic political system. Many who advocate voting "yes" are educated, articulate, and close to the European diplomatic community, which could offer one explanation for

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the divergence of views emerging within the EU of how best to approach Burma's constitutional referendum. The Third Force's view gets little play in the U.S., but has emerged as part of the debate among the country's pro-democracy opposition as they contemplate how best to strategize for the upcoming referendum and the 2010 election. End comment.
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